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# THE RELATIONSHIP OF DRUGS, DRUG TRAFFICKING, AND DRUG TRAFFICKERS TO HOMICIDE

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## ABSTRACT

*While the relationship between drugs and homicide has often been documented, its full extent and complexity are not well known. Using data from a study of 414 homicide events committed in New York City during eight months of 1988, this analysis explores that relationship. In addition, data are analyzed for 266 perpetrators and 236 victims of those cases. By conservative estimate, more than half of the homicide events were found to have been drug-related. In addition, it was determined that many that were not drug-related either took place at a known drug location,*

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*involved perpetrators and/or victims who were known by the police to have been involved with drugs and drug trafficking, or involved perpetrators and/or victims with prior official criminal records for drug sales or possession. The findings suggest that lethal violence or homicide to a large extent is focused on communities of people directly or indirectly involved with drugs or drug trafficking.*

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## INTRODUCTION

Both social scientists and criminal justice officials agree that to some extent and in some way or ways, drugs and homicide are related (see, Abel, 1987; Ball et al., 1983; Brownstein & Goldstein, 1990; Felson & Steadman, 1983; Gary, 1986; Goldstein et al., 1989; Graham, 1987; Gropper, 1985; Haberman & Baden, 1978; Heffernan et al., 1982; Hepburn & Voss, 1970; Johnson, 1989; McBride, 1981; Montforte & Spitz, 1975; Stephens & Ellis, 1975; Wolfgang, 1958; Wolfgang & Strohm, 1956; Zahn & Bencivengo, 1974). Most of the research in this area, however, has not adequately accounted for the full extent and complexity of the relationship.

One limitation of the drugs-homicide research is that many of the earliest studies and some later ones focused only on *alcohol* and on no other drugs (for example, Gary, 1986; Goodman et al., 1986; Wolfgang, 1958; Wolfgang & Strohm, 1956). Perhaps of greater import, much of this research focused only on the drug or alcohol use of *victims* (for example, Abel, 1987; Felson & Steadman, 1983; Goodman et al., 1986; Haberman & Baden, 1978; Hepburn & Voss, 1970; Riedel & Zahn, 1985; Wieczorek et al., 1990; Wolfgang, 1958; Zahn & Bencivengo, 1974). Only a few studies focused on the drug or alcohol use of the *perpetrator* at the time of the event being studied (see, Gary, 1986). And very few studies have examined the extent to which drug *trafficking* is related to homicide (see, Adler, 1985; Heffernan et al., 1982; Zahn, 1980).

The limited foci of the research on drugs and homicide to some extent is a function of the available data. One of the best sources of data for such studies is toxicological data on homicide victims. Wieczorek and his associates in a recent study of homicide and alcohol or drug use wrote, "data on drinking by [homicide] victims are more readily available than similar data on [homicide] offenders" (1990, p. 218). So medical examiner data of victims have been widely studied (see, Abel, 1987; Budd, 1989; Goodman et al., 1986; Haberman & Baden, 1978; Tardiff & Gross, 1986;), providing detail about the extent and types of drug use by homicide victims.

Since the earliest studies by Wolfgang and his associates (Wolfgang, 1958; Wolfgang & Strohm, 1956), data from police records have also been used to study the drugs and homicide nexus. Similarly, studies have used data from institutions where offenders have been incarcerated (Feldman & Steadman, 1983; Wieczorek et al., 1990). Through studies using these sources of data, it is clear that the drugs/homicide nexus goes beyond the use of drugs or alcohol by homicide victims.

The underlying problem of the earlier studies in identifying the extent and nature of drug involvement in homicide has been the lack of a theoretical framework that would permit analysis in terms of the complexity of the drugs/violence nexus. More recent studies have begun to address this problem (for example, Brownstein & Goldstein, 1990; Goldstein et al., 1989; Rosenfeld, 1990).

In this paper, data from a study of homicides in New York City in 1988 will be used to demonstrate the extent and nature of drug involvement in homicide. A tripartite conceptual framework will be employed so that drug relatedness will be assessed in terms of the variety of ways in which drugs and violence can be related. In addition, it will be demonstrated that other homicides, those not necessarily drug-related, sometimes involve drug-involved relationships, locations, perpetrators, and even victims. In fact, it will be demonstrated that very few "innocent bystanders" are involved in homicides as victims.

## THE TRIPARTITE CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

A tripartite conceptual framework developed by Goldstein (1985, 1986, 1989) for the classification of drug-related violent episodes can be used to distinguish types of drug-related homicides (Brownstein & Goldstein, 1990). It specifies three ways in which drugs and violent acts such as homicide can be related: psychopharmacological, economic compulsive, and systemic.

A drug-related homicide is considered psychopharmacological when it is the consequence of short or long term ingestion of specific substances by the perpetrator or the victim of the event. Ingestion might result in irrational or violent behavior by one actor or the other, or it might mark an individual as a docile victim for violent predators. In addition, an individual experiencing withdrawal symptoms from drugs might suffer high levels of anxiety that are then expressed in violent action.

Economic compulsive drug-related homicide occurs when a drug user feels compelled to participate in economically oriented violence in order to support costly drug use. A homicide that begins as a robbery to obtain money for drugs could be placed in this category, but only

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when the killing took place because someone had a compelling need to get drugs or money for drugs.

A drug-related homicide is considered systemic when it is the outcome of the traditionally aggressive patterns of interaction within the system of drug use and distribution. Drug-related homicides classified as systemic would include: murders committed within dealing hierarchies as a means of enforcing normative codes; robberies ending in the death of a drug dealer or a consequent fatal retaliation by the associates of a murdered drug dealer; killing of informers in drug cases; killings resulting from disputes between drug dealers over territory; disputes over drugs or drug paraphernalia; punishment of dealers for selling adulterated or phony drugs; punishment for failing to pay one's drug debts; and so on.

Sometimes even when it is clear that a homicide is drug-related, it is not possible to say that one drug-related dimension predominates. Cases are classified as multidimensional when they include two or more dimensions in similar enough magnitude that no one can be said to be more responsible for the event than can the other or others. For example, a case may be both psychopharmacological, because one of the participants was high on drugs or alcohol and acting irrationally, and systemic because it also involved a dispute between drug business associates.

The use of this comprehensive conceptual framework allows for classification of drug-related homicides in terms of the variety of ways that drugs and homicide are related. It therefore allows for better measurement of the extent of drug involvement in homicide cases.

## THE NEW YORK CITY HOMICIDES

### *Data Collection*

Data were collected from 17 (23%) of the 75 police precincts in New York City. These precincts comprised four of the city's patrol zones, one in each of the four largest boroughs: the Fifth Zone in Manhattan, the Ninth in the Bronx, the Thirteenth in Brooklyn, and the Eighteenth in Queens. Three things were considered in the selection of zones: 1) inclusion in the sample of 25 percent of the homicides that would occur in the city in 1988; 2) consultation and cooperation with the existing police administrative structure so as to maximize compliance, to facilitate training and dissemination of materials, and to maintain the support of the top of the command structure; and 3) representation of a cross-section of the city in terms of high and low homicide rates, social and ethnic composition of neighborhoods, and location.[1]

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All detectives in the New York City Police Department (NYPD) are required to record the progress of a homicide investigation in the same way. This "routine" paperwork convention includes the maintenance of a checklist of forms prepared, notifications made, interviews conducted, evidence vouchered, and other relevant reports prepared. The data collection form prepared for this study was incorporated as part of the paperwork in the case folder for each homicide case in each of the selected precincts. A representative of each of the detective squads included in the study attended a training and orientation session held at police headquarters.

The forms requested case-specific information not normally maintained in police files, particularly as it related to drugs. For example, information was requested about the characteristics and relationship of the victim and perpetrator, prior and immediate drug use (by type of drug) by the victim and perpetrator, whether or not the victim or perpetrator was known to be a drug dealer, the circumstances and location (including, when appropriate, the type of drug site) of the event; the type of weapon used, whether or not drugs or drug paraphernalia were found at the scene or at the time of arrest, whether the victim or the perpetrator appeared to be high or sick and in need of drugs at the time of the event, whether or not the incident involved a drug sale or purchase, whether and specifically how drug trafficking might have been involved, and how the case might fit the tripartite conceptual framework. The form also requested a narrative description of "what happened."

Forms in each detective squad were completed in a manner appropriate to the normal operation of the office. Whatever procedure was followed, the forms were kept in the case file as long as the case was active, or until two months after the close of the data collection period.

Project staff met with and interviewed every squad commander or his or her representative at least once. In this way, a level of standardization was maintained and the maximum information available about each case was collected (Ryan, 1990). A particular concern during the interviews was the classification of cases as drug-related or not and their classification in terms of the tripartite framework. The final coding of cases in terms of the tripartite conceptual categories was accomplished through a process wherein consensus was achieved by at least two members of the project staff.

Along with the data collected about each of these cases from the police, data were added for perpetrators and victims for whom the police had provided a New York State identification number (NYSIS). These data provided information about prior criminal record.

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Whenever someone is arrested and fingerprinted in New York State, a copy of those fingerprints is sent to the State Division of Criminal Justice Services (DCJS). There are between four and five million sets of fingerprints in the DCJS database (called the Computerized Criminal History [CCH] file). Offenders are identifiable by a identifier called a NYSIS number, which is attached to each set of fingerprints as it is entered. It is possible, then, to produce a record of any given offender's previous criminal arrests. DCJS also receives follow-up information on each arrest – dispositions and sentences from the courts, and corrections, probation and parole information from those agencies – so the rap sheets produced by this system are a relatively inclusive record of an offender's criminal history.

For each victim and each perpetrator in the sample for whom a NYSIS number was available and known, prior criminal record information was added to the case data file. Included was information about things such as total number of prior arrests, felony arrests and misdemeanor arrests, the type and severity of prior drug arrests, and the type and severity of prior arrests for violent offenses.

## *The Sample*

Data were collected for all homicide cases committed in the 17 New York City police precincts from March 1, 1988 to October 31, 1988. During this period, there were 414 homicide events in the 17 precincts. There were 436 victims and, assuming at least one in each case, 491 perpetrators involved in the 414 homicides. One case involved five perpetrators and one involved six victims. Since the database was constructed to allow for no more than four perpetrators or victims in a single case, the total sample for analysis includes 490 perpetrators (assuming one perpetrator in those cases where none was reported) and 434 victims.

Of the 490 perpetrators, 250 were arrested and an additional 39 were identified for analytic purposes despite the fact that no arrest had been made. An additional seven perpetrators were known by the police to have been killed or to have committed suicide and two others to have fled the country. The 434 victims of cases that occurred between March 1 and October 30 represent about 23% of the total 1,896 victims of homicide in New York City in 1988.

Using NYSIS numbers for matching cases to state criminal history files, it was possible to obtain additional prior criminal history information for 266 (54%) of the 490 perpetrators (92% of the arrested or otherwise known perpetrators) and for 236 (54%) of the 434 victims.

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As part of the original data collection, police were asked for NYSIS numbers when they were available for both perpetrators and victims. They provided 271 NYSIS numbers for perpetrators and 194 NYSIS numbers for victims. Cases with incorrect NYSIS numbers totaling 59 (38 for perpetrators and 21 for victims) were first reviewed by NDRI staff involved directly in the original data collection and file preparation. For 24 perpetrators and 12 victims, the NYSIS numbers were corrected. The remaining 23 incorrect NYSIS numbers were then checked against the CCH records at DCJS. At this stage, a NYSIS number was corrected only if the name on the record matched exactly with the name on the CCH files. This procedure resulted in the correction of NYSIS numbers for ten additional cases, five each for perpetrators and victims.

The remaining 47 cases of perpetrators and 240 cases of victims that had names but no NYSIS number were then forwarded to the Fingerprint Division of DCJS to obtain the NYSIS number. That bureau was able to find NYSIS numbers for 16 additional perpetrators and 48 additional victims.

Once the lists of NYSIS numbers for both perpetrators and victims were constructed, they were each checked for internal duplication. This resulted in the deletion of six perpetrator cases and two victim cases from the final sample. Hence, as shown in Figure 1 below, 266 perpetrator and 236 victim cases were available for analysis.

## THE DRUG RELATEDNESS OF HOMICIDE EVENTS

Of the 414 homicide events in the sample from New York City during the eight-month period of 1988, 52.7% were clearly identified as drug-related (see Table 1). Given the methods of data collection and case classification, this is a conservative estimate. Only when both the police and research staff agreed that drugs contributed to the killing in a causal and important way were cases classified as drug-related. Cases for which there was insufficient evidence to make such a determination were classified as not drug-related, even when it was possible that they were. Cases so classified included things like the killings of persons known to the police as drug traffickers or bodies found in known drug sites when there was no evidence to link the event itself to drugs. For example:

> The body of a 37-year-old black female was found in an alley. She was known by the police to have been a user of cocaine, and maybe crack, and a prostitute. She was found naked, her body stuffed in a plastic garbage bag. She had suffered two

**Figure 1**

**Selection of Samples**

| ITEM | Perpetrator | Victim |
|---|---|---|
| 1) Total number of cases | 490 | 434 |
| 2) Number of cases with NYSIS #s | 271 | 194 |
| 2.1) Cases with correct NYSIS # | 233 | 173 |
| 2.2) Cases with incorrect NYSIS # | 38 | 21 |
| 2.3) NDRI corrected the number | 24 | 12 |
| 2.4) DCJS corrected through CCH files | 5 | 5 |
| 2.5) Cases with no known criminal record | 2 | 3 |
| 2.6) Cases with different name on CCH | 7 | 1 |
| 3) Number of cases without NYSIS # but with name | 47 | 240 |
| 3.1) NYSIS # found from fingerprint records | 16 | 48 |
| 3.2) NYSIS # could not be found from fingerprint records | 31 | 192 |
| 4) Number of cases with no names and no NYSIS # | 172 | 0 |
| 5) Duplicate record | 6 | 2 |
| 6) Number of perpetrators with Juvenile Offender/Delinqent records | 5 | 0 |
| 7) Number of persons with NYSIS only for pistol permit | 1 | 0 |
| 8) Number of cases used for analysis | 266 | 236 |

Note: (1)=(2)+(3)+(4) and (8)=(2.1)+(2.3)+(2.4)+(3.1)-(5)-(6)-(7)

head wounds from a blunt instrument and multiple superficial stab wounds on her body. Police believe that the killing was related to the local drug scene. But the case was classified as not drug-related. (Case #15)

The tripartite conceptual framework helps to clarify what is meant by drug relatedness (see Table 2). Of the 218 homicides that were classified as drug-related, about 74% were identified as primarily systemic, 14% as psychopharmacological, 8% as multidimensional, and 4% as economic compulsive.

Most of the systemic drug-related cases involved the business or operation of an illegal drug market (see Table 3). Cases included territorial disputes between drug dealers, the robbery of a drug dealer, the discipline of a drug business employee for infractions of a normative code of conduct, disputes over quality control or money, and so on.

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**Table 1**

**Homicides by Drug-Relatedness (n=414)**

| | |
|---|---|
| Drug-Related | 52.7% |
| Not Drug-Related | 47.3 |
| TOTAL | 100.0 |

**Table 2**

**Tripartite Conceptual Framework, Primary Categorization-Drug Related Cases (n=218)**

| Primary Categorization | Number | Percent |
|---|---|---|
| Psychopharmacological | 31 | 14.2% |
| Economic Compulsive | 8 | 3.7 |
| Systemic | 162 | 74.3 |
| Multidimensional | 17 | 7.8 |
| TOTAL | 218 | 100.0 |

A 24-year-old low-level crack dealer who worked for a higher level crack dealer decided to free-lance. He tried to take over a part of his employer's territory for himself. The employer found out about this plan. He hired a highly successful and locally well-known enforcer. One day, when the low-level dealer was standing by a telephone booth with his girlfriend, the enforcer approached him and casually fired three bullets from a 9 mm. automatic weapon into his head. (Case #8)

Systemic cases also included some that did not directly involve the drug trade, but did involve interpersonal violence between drug users or a drug user and someone else.

An 18-year-old Hispanic male decided to act as a vigilante, keeping "crack heads" out of his building. A 35-year-old black male came to the building to buy crack. When the younger man approached him, they began pushing and shoving one another. During the scuffle, the older man was stabbed twice with a knife, in the chest and abdomen. (Case # 26)

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**Table 3**

**Types of Drug Trafficking Involvement – Systemic Cases (n = 162)**

| Trafficking Relationship | Number | Percent* |
|---|---|---|
| Fight by rival dealers over territory | 59 | 36.4 |
| Dealer killed for selling bad drugs | 7 | 4.3 |
| Buyer killed in fight over bad drugs | 1 | 0.6 |
| Execution of police drug informer | 1 | 0.6 |
| Dispute over works or paraphernalia | 1 | 0.6 |
| Dispute over theft of drugs | 12 | 7.4 |
| Assault to collect drug-related debt | 22 | 13.6 |
| Punishment of drug workers by dealer | 16 | 9.9 |
| Homicide during robbery of drug dealer | 33 | 20.4 |
| Other drug trafficking | 9 | 5.6 |
| Other drug-related circumstance | 12 | 7.4 |

* Equals more than 100 percent, since each case may be coded more than one way.

Psychopharmacological cases involved violent behavior by perpetrators and victims who were acting irrationally, victimization of persons whose drug or alcohol use had made them docile victims forviolent predators, disputes between two or more people, all of whom were acting irrationally due to drug or alcohol ingestion, and so on.

> A 29-year-old woman and a 41-year-old man were living together for eight years in a common law marriage. They had two children together. He believed that she was seeing other men. In addition, she had a job and he did not; he felt belittled by the fact that he was out of work. So they often fought. During one fight, when he was high on alcohol and cocaine, he lost control. He grabbed a kitchen knife that she was holding and stabbed her repeatedly. She died of multiple stab wounds to the body. (Case #100)

The few economic compulsive cases involved a robbery, usually by someone who was in need of drugs or money for drugs. Sometimes the victim was a relative, and usually he or she was elderly.

> After being alive for more than 99 years, a woman was getting off the elevator on the 14th floor of her building to walk to her apartment. A 22-year-old male, determined to get money to support his crack habit, followed her. He hit her over the head and grabbed her handbag. She fell to the floor, the

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**Table 4**

**Type of Homicide by Victim/Perpetrator Relationship**

| | Drug-Related n = 218 | | Not Drug-Related n = 196 | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | No. | Percent | No. | Percent |
| Spouse, Boy/Girlfriend | 7 | 3.2 | 19 | 9.7 |
| Child | 1 | 0.4 | 3 | 1.5 |
| Parent | 3 | 1.4 | 0 | 0.0 |
| Sibling | 2 | 0.9 | 3 | 1.5 |
| Friend, Acquaintance, Neighbor | 45 | 20.6 | 59 | 30.1 |
| Drug Business Related | 106 | 48.6 | 6 | 3.1 |
| Police or Peace Officer | 4 | 1.8 | 1 | 0.5 |
| Stranger | 29 | 13.3 | 59 | 30.1 |
| Innocent Bystander | 4 | 1.8 | 1 | 0.5 |
| Undetermined | 17 | 7.8 | 45 | 23.0 |
| TOTAL | | 99.9 | | 100.0 |

victim of a robbery. But she never recovered. Six days later, she died from injuries suffered during the attack. (Case #176)

Even homicide events that are *not* drug-related sometimes involve perpetrators and victims whose interpersonal relationship involves drugs (see Table 4). In six (3%) of the 196 cases classified as *not* drug-related, the victim and the perpetrator were known to have been drug business associates. In addition, 30% of these cases involved strangers. This is comparable to the 25% of victims of other-than-systemic drug-related cases. (Only 9% of the victims of systemic drug-related cases were strangers.) And 23% involved a victim and perpetrator of unknown relationship. In some of these cases, it would be difficult to say with certainty that the homicide was really not drug-related, though that is how each was classified.

A 32-year-old man is known in his neighborhood for stealing radios and other things from parked cars. One day he is found dead, with multiple stab wounds in his chest. The police do not know who did it but they suspect it was people from the neighborhood who got fed up with being ripped off. But they cannot be sure. The victim was also known to have been a cocaine or crack user and to have been involved in the local drug scene. They can't link the killing to drugs, but they admit to being unsure. (Case #211)

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Only one case among the 196 cases classified as *not* drug-related involved an innocent bystander. Notably, only five cases (1%) of all 414 homicide events involved an innocent bystander.

Sometimes cases that are classified as not drug-related took place at a location known to the police as a drug site. That is, it is a place where drugs are bought and sold, stored, or manufactured (see Table 5). Of those that were *not* drug-related, more than 89% took place at locations that were *not* drug sites, as compared to less than 43% of the drug-related cases. However, almost 11% of the *not* drug-related cases did take place at a drug site, most of them being drug sales locations.

One of the questions on the data collection form asked the police to identify the reason or reasons they identified a case as drug-related. The greatest number of homicide events in the sample of drug-related cases (84%) were identified by the police as drug-related as a result of a known drug involvement of the victim or perpetrator or both. In 17 percent of the cases, the identification was also or independently based on the fact that investigators found drug contraband or drugs at the crime scene. In 15% there was evidence of drug consumption by someone involved in the event.

Of the cases identified as not drug-related, eight (4%) had a psychopharmacological dimension and another eight (4%) had a systemic dimension. In addition, there were 31 cases (16%) identified as not drug-related that the police indicated probably were drug-related but lacked sufficient evidence to classify them as such. Most of these involved things like the robbery of a taxi cab driver where the perpetrator remained unknown, or "dump jobs" where a body was found in a drug site but nothing else was known about the case.

> The victim was a 21-year-old white female. The police knew she was a user of heroin, cocaine, and crack and was enrolled in a drug treatment program. It appears that the only drug she was using prior to the killing was methadone. The perpetrator was not found. Her body was found in her residence, also used as a shooting gallery. Her throat was slashed and she had multiple stab wounds in her back. The police identified her as a "local heroin gal" who "hangs with shit." But no one could say with certainty that her killing had anything to do with drugs or drug use. So the case was classified as not drug-related. (Case #183)

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**Table 5**

**Types of Homicide by Location**

| | Drug-Related n = 218 | | Not Drug-Related n = 196 | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | No. | Percent | No. | Percent |
| Drug Sales Location | 114 | 52.3 | 20 | 10.2 |
| Other Drug Site | 11 | 5.0 | 1 | 0.5 |
| Not a Drug Site | 93 | 42.7 | 175 | 89.3 |
| TOTAL | 218 | 100.0 | 196 | 100.0 |

## PERPETRATORS AND DRUG RELATEDNESS

The data allow for perpetrator drug involvement to be examined in two ways. The data from police records include information about the known drug use and trafficking of perpetrators known to the police. In addition, data from the CCH file include information about prior arrests and convictions for drug offenses of perpetrators for whom NYSIS numbers were available.

Of the 490 perpetrators involved in the 414 homicide events, both police and criminal history data were available for 266 (54%) cases. (As noted earlier, these 266 cases account for 92% of all perpetrators arrested or otherwise known to the police by the time data collection ended.) Of the total 266 perpetrators, the police identified 81 (30%) as known drug users; of those, 11 (14% of the 81) were involved in cases that were not drug-related. Only 13 perpetrators (5% of the 266) were identified as high-level drug traffickers, one involved in a not drug-related case. And 75 (28% of the 266) were identified as low-level traffickers, four of these having been involved in cases that were not drug-related (see Table 6).

To be included in this sample, each of the 266 perpetrators had to have an official criminal history. The official records show that many of them, including several who were involved in not drug-related cases, had prior arrests and even convictions for prior drug offenses (see Table 7). Of the total 266 perpetrators, 77 (29%) had at least one prior arrest for drug possession; 24 (about 31% of the 77 cases) were involved in not-drug-related cases. Fifty-two of the 266 perpetrators (20%) had at least one prior arrest for drug sales; 15 of these (29% of the 52) were involved in not-drug-related cases. Of the total 266 perpetrators, 55 (21%) had at least one conviction for a prior

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**Table 6**

**Perpetrator Drug Involvement Known to the Police.**

| | Drug-Related n = 145 | | Not Drug-Related n = 121 | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | No. | Percent* | No. | Percent* |
| Known Drug User | 70 | 48.2 | 11 | 9.0 |
| Known Trafficker | | | | |
| High Level | 12 | 8.2 | 1 | 0.8 |
| Low Level | 71 | 49.0 | 4 | 3.3 |

* Percentage of respective drug-related or not drug-related cases.

**Table 7**

**Prior Criminal Records of Perpetrators**

| | Drug-Related n = 145 | | Not Drug-Related n = 121 | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | No. | Percent* | No. | Percent* |
| Drug Possession | | | | |
| At least one arrest | 53 | 36.5 | 24 | 19.9 |
| At least one conviction | 23 | 15.9 | 11 | 9.1 |
| Drug Sales | | | | |
| At least one arrest | 37 | 25.5 | 15 | 12.4 |
| At least one conviction | 15 | 10.4 | 6 | 4.9 |

* Percentage is of respective drug-related or not drug-related cases.

drug offense, possession or sales; 17 of the 55 cases (31%) involved cases that were *not* drug-related.

## VICTIMS AND DRUG RELATEDNESS

The data similarly allow for victim drug involvement to be examined in two ways. The data from police records include information about the known drug use and trafficking of victims known to the police. In addition, data from the CCH file include information about prior arrests and convictions for drug offenses of victims for whom NYSIS numbers were available.

Of the 434 victims involved in the 414 homicide events, both police and criminal history data were available for 236 cases. That is, more

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than half (54%) of all of the homicide victims in the sample had an official prior criminal record. These records were located without much difficulty, so the 54% figure is probably a low estimate. It is possible though not probable that none of the remaining 198 victims had a prior criminal record.

Of the 236 victims for whom data were available, 157 (67%) were involved in drug-related cases and 79 (33%) in not drug-related cases. More than half of the 236 victims (124 or 53%) were identified by the police as known drug users; 18 of these (15% of the 124) were involved in not drug-related cases. Five (2%) were identified as high-level drug dealers, all of these involved in drug-related cases. But more than one-third of these victims (92 or 39%) were identified as known low-level

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**Table 8**

**Victim Drug Involvement Known to the Police**

| | Drug-Related n = 157 | | Not Drug-Related n = 79 | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | No. | Percent* | No. | Percent* |
| Known Drug User | 106 | 67.5 | 18 | 22.7 |
| Known Trafficker | | | | |
| High Level | 5 | 3.2 | 0 | 0.0 |
| Low Level | 88 | 56.1 | 4 | 5.1 |

* Percentage is of respective drug-related or not drug-related cases.

**Table 9**

**Prior Criminal Records of Victims**

| | Drug-Related n = 157 | | Not Drug-Related n = 79 | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | No. | Percent* | No. | Percent* |
| Drug Possession | | | | |
| At least one arrest | 75 | 47.8 | 24 | 30.3 |
| At least one conviction | 35 | 22.3 | 11 | 13.9 |
| Drug Sales | | | | |
| At least one arrest | 51 | 32.5 | 18 | 22.8 |
| At least one conviction | 21 | 13.3 | 7 | 8.9 |

* Percentage is of respective drug-related or not drug-related cases.

drug traffickers and four of these (4% of the 92) were involved in not drug-related cases (see Table 8).

By definition, all 236 victims included in this sample had an official prior criminal history. Still, the number with prior arrests and convictions for drug offenses in particular is noteworthy (see Table 9). Of all 236 victims, 99 (42%) had at least one prior arrest for drug possession; of these about one-fourth (24 or 24% of the 99) were involved in cases classified as not drug-related. About one-third of all had at least one prior arrest for drug sales, and 18 of these victims (26% of the 69) were involved in not drug-related cases. Of the total 236 victims, 74 (31%) had at least one prior conviction for a drug offense, possession or sales; 18 of these (24% of the 74) involved cases that were not classified as drug-related.

## CONCLUSION

According to official statistics, in recent years the amount of violence in American communities does appear to have grown, as has the extent of drug use and trade (U.S. Department of Justice, 1989, 1990). In response, there has been an unprecedented expansion of law enforcement. Throughout the country, hundreds of new prisons have been built and thousands of new police officers hired. In addition, the rights of criminal defendants are being questioned in the courts and interest in harsh punishment is growing.

Pepinsky and Jesilow have suggested that "more and swifter punishment of offenders by criminal-justice officials aggravates some of the problems, ignores most of the problems, and generally decreases public safety" (1984:2). They believe rather that a government interested in crime reduction "needs to concentrate not so much on law enforcement but on action that strengthens American communities and makes them secure" (1984, p. 2). The findings of this analysis generally support that conclusion by suggesting that while violence is a serious problem in our communities, the emphasis on law enforcement may not be the most appropriate response.

The analysis demonstrates that at least one type of violence, lethal violence or homicide, to a large extent is focused on the drug scene and its participants, especially on drug trafficking and drug traffickers. More than half of all homicides in the sample were found to be drug-related. Some that were not nonetheless took place at a drug site. Many of those that were not drug-related did involve perpetrators and victims who were involved with drugs independent of their involvement in the homicide. Many victims and perpetrators had prior official criminal records for drug sales or possession. Many were

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known to the police to have been involved in drug use or in the drug trade. Almost no innocent bystanders were victims of homicide.

This is not to say that citizens not involved in crime or drugs are never the victims of homicide, but only that the extent of the threat to their safety has been exaggerated. It is the people who live in or near drug-involved communities that are at the greatest risk. Rather than emphasizing the punishment of these people for their use or involvement with drugs, perhaps we would achieve better results through peaceful actions aimed making them more secure in their own communities.

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## NOTES

1. All steps were taken to assure that demographically, geographically, and in terms of the the mix of drugs and crime the selected police zones were representative of the remainder of the city. To assess representativeness, we focused specifically on the homicide perpetrators in our sample, for whom we had the greatest amount of information and for whom the greatest amount of comparable information was available for others who were not in our sample. According to official records, there were 1478 individuals arrested for homicide in all of New York City from March 1 to October 31, 1988. Using the chi-square test to compare the perpetrators in our sample to those in the population, we found no statistically significant difference in terms sex, county of arrest, or number and type of prior drug arrests. Using the Kolmogrov-Smirnov test, we found no statistically significant difference in terms of age or in terms of the number, type, or seriousness of prior arrest or conviction records. There was a statistically significant difference found in terms of race, a higher percentage of sample perpetrators being black.

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